

Compost Background

Composting removes your grass clippings, weeds, leaves and other yard trimmings from of the waste stream and turns them into a valuable soil amendment. Composting is the ultimate recycling activity and you can do it in your own backyard!

Compost is a dark, crumbly, earthy-smelling material that is the result of organic material decomposition. Compost helps retain moisture, provides nutrients to growing plants, improves the structure of soil and can help suppress soil-borne plant diseases. Gardeners consider compost black gold.

Basic Compost How-To

Backyard composting basics are fairly straightforward: layer equal amounts (by volume) of green, nitrogen-rich materials (grass clippings, fruit and vegetable scraps, weeds, plants, and/or manure) with brown, carbon-rich materials (dry leaves, shredded paper, sawdust, wood chips, and/or wood ash), adding some finished compost or soil between the layers, if desired, to boost the microbial levels. Water the layers so that the pile is about as wet as a wrung out sponge. Then, let it rot! As the microorganisms, earthworms, centipedes and other decomposers in the pile feed, the pile will shrink to a fraction of its original volume. The decomposition can happen without much intervention on your part, but making sure that the pile has adequate moisture and oxygen is important to the health and efficiency of your compost pile. Turning the pile periodically using a pitchfork will aerate and help speed up the process, as will adding water.

The pile should be at least 3x3x3 feet, and probably not more than 5x5x5 feet. A bin is not necessary for the compost pile, but helps keep it neat. You can construct a bin from chicken wire, old pallets, lumber, or snow fencing. Various types of bins are commercially available

Pick up a **FREE** composting bin and learn more about composting and redworm composting from Howard County Master Gardeners at the following Demonstration sites in 2009:

Alpha Ridge Landfill, Centennial Park (near boat launch), Howard County Conservancy, and Schooley Mill Park (near horse ring-- Red worm composting demonstrations too!)

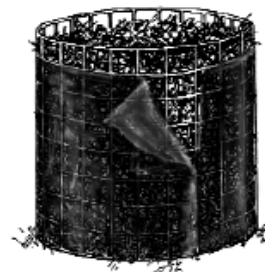
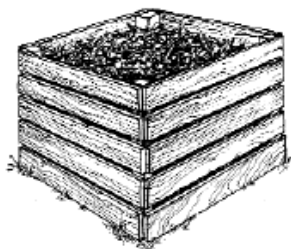
More Information

More information about composting is available at from the University of Maryland's Home and Garden Information Center at http://www.hgic.umd.edu/media/documents/hg35_002.pdf

Interested in composting but don't have room in your yard for a compost pile? Consider indoor redworm composting. <http://www.hgic.umd.edu/media/documents/IndoorRedwormCompostingHG40pfv.pdf>

Need more information? Contact mqcompostdemo@verizon.net

Some compost bin designs:



Howard County Master Gardeners
www.howardcountyrecycles.org

